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The semantics of word borrowing in late medieval English – a preliminary investigation **Louise Sylvester, Megan Tiddeman, Richard Ingham & Kathryn Allan**

Abstract

The paper presents a pilot study investigating the extent of sense sharing between loanwords in Middle English and their etyma in French and Latin, undertaken as part of a new three-year project. Fifty loanwords have been examined, with all senses in the borrowing and donor language(s) recorded using the major historical dictionaries. These have been standardised and mapped onto a framework using the categories of the *Historical Thesaurus of English* to allow comparison. Our main results show that polysemy is nearly always mirrored but complete semantic overlap is rare; that senses unique to Middle English are common but short-lived; and that figurative senses are almost never borrowed into Middle English without the original literal senses.

Introduction

This paper reports on the results of a pilot study undertaken as part of the Leverhulme Trust-funded project: *The Semantics of Word Borrowing in Late Medieval English*. The effects of French loans on Middle English are often seen as having resulted in lexical replacement (Schendl 2000: 78; Trotter 2017: 234) or in differentiation between borrowed words and near-synonymous native terms (Smith 1996: 96). However, it has been noted that when retention rates for words first attested between 1100 and 1500 are compared, loanwords, not native terms, are more likely to become obsolete at any time up to the nineteenth century (Sylvester *et al.* 2022 a). Furthermore, proportions of outcomes involving narrowing and broadening are low in the Middle English period, and words that narrow or extend their senses appear to include a higher proportion of French loanwords than native terms (Sylvester *et al.* 2022b). This raises the question of whether words borrowed into Middle English shift independently as a result of their situation in the new ecology of English, or if their semantic development mirrors semantic shifts occurring in French and / or Latin, so that what we see is polysemic borrowing.

One example of a French loanword with multiple senses in English is *mercery*, which seems to narrow semantically in English from ‘merchandise’ to ‘fine textiles’. This shift is also recorded in Anglo-French, however, so it is likely that both English senses were borrowed. Conversely, the loanword *pipin* ‘apple seed’ develops a new sense, ‘type of apple’, in the early 1400s. This meaning is unique to English and is never recorded in French or Latin.

In this study, we therefore seek to trace the semantic development of loanwords in Middle English and compare their meanings in the source languages, French and Latin. Where previous work has focused on a small number of individual words, we intend to look at a considerably larger body of data. We also investigate whether figurative senses of loanwords from French/Latin were more likely to become established in English than non-figurative senses, as suggested by Allan (2014; 2015).

1. Methodology

1.1. Collating the main loanword dataset

The creation of the database used in this study will first be outlined. To begin, French and Latin loanwords from a total of ten semantic domains were identified. These comprise seven

occupational domains taken from the *Bilingual Thesaurus of Everyday Life in Medieval England* (Ingham & Sylvester 2017): BUILDING, DOMESTIC ACTIVITIES, FARMING, FOOD PREPARATION, HUNTING, MANUFACTURE, MEDICINE, TRADE and TRAVEL BY WATER. Vocabulary from an emerging professional domain (MEDICINE) and an elite domain (HUNTING) were added to this dataset in the Leverhulme Trust-funded project *Technical language and semantic shift in Middle English* (2017-2020). The tenth domain, ANGER, was added for the current project to provide a contrast with the ‘non-emotional’ domains and potentially more examples of figurative language use.

A total of 1630 loanwords (1294 nouns and 336 verbs) attested in Middle English (ME) before 1450 were recorded, based on etymologies given in the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED).¹ These are tagged as ‘Continental French/Anglo-French’ (CF/AF), ‘Latin’ (L) and ‘Latin and/or French’ (L+OF/AF)² and are distributed across the ten domains as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Distribution of loanwords across the original 10 domains in the main dataset with language(s) of origin

Domain:	Language of origin tag for loanword:						Total	
	CF/AF	%	L	%	L + CF/AF	%		
ANGER	62	63%	3	3%	33	34%	98	100%
BUILDING	66	53%	12	10%	47	38%	125	100%
DOMESTIC ACTIVITIES	50	68%	9	12%	15	20%	74	100%
FARMING	78	63%	14	11%	32	26%	124	100%
FOOD PREPARATION	80	73%	9	8%	20	18%	109	100%
HUNTING	160	86%	2	1%	24	13%	186	100%
MANUFACTURE	78	63%	20	16%	25	20%	123	100%
MEDICINE	109	25%	172	40%	152	35%	433	100%
TRADE	111	70%	20	13%	28	18%	159	100%
TRAVEL BY WATER	54	63%	9	10%	23	27%	86	100%
Multi-domain	79	70%	6	5%	28	25%	113	100%
Total	927	57%	276	17%	427	26%	1630	100%

¹ Note that we did not include loanwords from the previous project corpus which were first recorded in Old English (e.g. *alabastrum*: MED s.v. *alabastrum*; OED3 s.v. *alabastrum*; *patriarch*: MED s.v. *patriark(e)*; OED3 s.v. *patriarch*) as we wished to focus solely on non-native terms which entered the language during the ME period.

² E.g. *plum*: MED s.v. *plum*; OED3 s.v. *plumb#1*; *multiplicacioun*: MED s.v. *multiplicaciou*; OED3 s.v. *multiplication*; *labour*: MED s.v. *labour*; OED3 s.v. *labour/labor*. Loanwords with ‘mixed’ Latin and French etyma are very common in the ME period, with etymologies being notoriously difficult to unravel (see Durkin 2014: 236-265).

Over half (57%) of loanwords in the main dataset are tagged as ‘Continental French/Anglo-French’ with around a quarter (26%) categorised as ‘Latin and/or French’, and the remainder (17%) as ‘Latin’. These relative proportions are roughly mirrored across nine of the ten domains, including ANGER. In contrast, MEDICINE stands out as the only domain where loanwords of purely Latin origin dominate at 40%. Whilst these domain-specific observations offer a useful starting point, they become less pertinent during the next stage of the pilot when all senses recorded in ME for each loanword are considered, and not just those linked to the ten semantic domains.

1.2. Selecting the data for the pilot study

The next step was selecting fifty loanwords for the study, of which ten were monosemous and forty polysemous in ME. The two main considerations for analysis were: first, selecting polysemes with a manageable number of senses so that similarities and differences with senses recorded in the source language(s) could be compared; secondly, ensuring that there was sufficient evidence of each loanword’s use within ME-matrix sources, in order to avoid loanwords which were obviously very rare in the historical record.³ The following three criteria were used for choosing loanwords to include in the pilot:

1. The loanword must have one to five senses attested in ME before 1450 in any semantic domain.⁴
2. The loanword must have at least one sense with three or more ME-matrix citations attested before 1450.
3. For all other senses, the loanword must have at least one ME-matrix citation.

This means that, by definition, hapaxes are excluded from the data subset, as are words which only have citations from French or Latin-matrix sources, or words which have only two ME-matrix citations for each sense. Once the factors above had been considered, it was not possible to ensure a distribution by source language etyma that was entirely representative of the wider dataset but French-origin loanwords still dominated, with Latin being the smallest group.⁵

The fifty loanwords consisted of five subgroups of ten, each including nine nouns and one verb as shown in Table 2:

³ It is quite a common phenomenon for entries in the MED to consist mainly or even entirely of citations which are taken from Anglo-French or British Medieval Latin-matrix texts e.g. *MED* s.v. *chalonere*; *clivie*; *rone*; *rush*; *saucer*; *timon*; *torel*; *vertwel*.

⁴ E.g. the French borrowing *gardin*, meaning ‘garden’, was included in our original dataset under the domain of DOMESTIC ACTIVITIES. However, for this pilot, we now also record that it is used figuratively in ME to mean ‘Soul, spirit, heart’ (*MED* s.v. *gardin*; *OED3* s.v. *garden*).

⁵ The breakdown for the fifty loanwords was: ‘Continental French/Anglo French’ (38); ‘Latin and/or French’ (8); ‘Latin’ (4).

Table 2: Sub-groups of loanwords selected for the pilot study with examples

Monosemes in ME	1-sense words	10 (9 nouns and 1 verb)	e.g. <i>cintre</i> <i>fildor</i>
Polysemes in ME	2-sense words	10 (9 nouns and 1 verb)	e.g. <i>clister</i> <i>sider</i>
	3-sense words	10 (9 nouns and 1 verb)	e.g. <i>restoracioun</i> <i>scantiloun</i>
	4-sense words	10 (9 nouns and 1 verb)	e.g. <i>costen</i> <i>vitaile</i>
	5-sense words	10 (9 nouns and 1 verb)	e.g. <i>fervour</i> <i>quirre</i>
	Total	50 (45 nouns and 5 verbs)	

Note that the majority of these loanwords have a long history in English and are not fleeting lexical rarities. Thirty-eight out of fifty (or 76%) are still recorded in at least one sense in Present Day English (PDE), defined as the last *OED* citation from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century which is not tagged as obsolete. Nearly all the loanwords survived after 1500 in at least one sense, *irour* and *fildor* being the only exceptions.

1.3 Comparing senses across borrowing and donor languages

The final stage of data collection involved recording loanword meanings in the donor language(s) using the relevant major historical dictionaries.⁶ Notes on attestation and obsolescence dates for each sense, text type, figurative language use, and narrowing and broadening were also documented. To allow analysis of polysemic overlap with ME, a ‘sense summary’ was created for each loanword where all senses were mapped onto a common framework using the semantic categories of the *HT*. An example is given below in Figure 1 for the French/Latin borrowing, *veneri(e)*:

⁶ For Anglo-French: *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (AND); for Continental French: *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (FEW), *Dictionnaire étymologique de l’ancien français* (DEAF), *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* (DMF), *Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX^e au XV^e siècles* (GDF), *Trésor de la langue française* (TLF); for British Medieval Latin: *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (DMLBS).

Figure 1: Example of a section of a loanword sense summary showing polysemic overlap

No. 13: MED veneri(e)#2 (n.) < Old French <i>venerie</i> , <i>venairie</i> & Anglo-Latin <i>vēnāria</i> , <i>vēneria</i>		OED2 venery#1 (n.) < Old French F <i>venerie</i> (French <i>vénerie</i>) < <i>vener</i> < Latin <i>venārī</i>		
HT senses:	ME a1300-1450+	BML c1114-1212	AF s.xii ^{ex} -s.xiv ⁱⁿ	CF c1160-1450+
Sense 1: Hunting	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sense 2: Animals hunted	✓	✓	✓	
Sense 3: Group/band of hunters				✓
Sense 4: Hunting area		✓		
No. of shared senses between ME and source language(s):	2 out of 4; Some			
Figurative language:	Metonymy: shared with ME, Sense 2 Metonymy: source language(s) only, Senses 3 and 4			
Narrowing/Broadening:	None			

This loanword is polysemous in ME, British Medieval Latin (BML), Anglo-French (AF) and Continental French (CF), with the earliest sense (‘Hunting’) being shared across all four languages. There are three further metonymic senses: ‘Animals hunted’, recorded only in England in ME, BML and AF; ‘Group/band of hunters’, recorded only in CF; ‘Hunting area’, only recorded in BML. Of the four senses, only two are shared between ME and French/Latin – hence this loanword is tagged ‘Some’ because some, but not all, of the loanword’s senses are borrowed into English. The full typologies for analysing polysemy and figurative language use are given in the relevant results section below.

It is widely accepted that semantic definitions are to some extent subjective (Kilgariff 1997: 98; Molina 2008: 3) and mapping the senses of a word from numerous historical dictionaries onto a single common framework is not a simple endeavour. At times, we have made decisions about which senses can be condensed into a single semantic category or divided over two, i.e. ‘lumped’ or ‘split’ (Kilgariff 1997: 100), and this process has had to be adopted to collate data for meaningful investigation.

2. Results

2.1. Polysemy

In general, polysemy in the borrowing language mirrors that of the source language(s). This is unsurprising since the same outcome has been noted in previous smaller analyses by Durkin and Allan (2016), Durkin (2018) and Ingham (2021). In our study, 86% (43/50) of loanwords in ME matched the source language(s) in terms of whether they were monosemous or polysemous (i.e. loanwords with one sense in ME also had one sense in French/Latin, and loanwords with multiple senses in ME also had multiple senses in French/Latin). When the ten

ME monosemes are excluded, the match rate is even higher at 95% – in the forty cases where a loanword is a polyseme in ME, it is also a polyseme in French/Latin in thirty-eight cases.

2.1.1. Semantic overlap

To analyse sense-sharing between borrowing and donor languages in finer detail the following typology for investigating semantic overlap was developed:

One of one: the word has only one recorded sense and it is shared between ME and the source language(s). E.g.: *keie* has one sense (‘Wharf/quay’) recorded in French, Latin and ME.

One of some: the word has one sense shared between ME and source language(s), and the total number of recorded senses is more than one. E.g.: *irour* has one sense (‘Anger’) shared between French and ME but two additional senses (‘Hatred’ and ‘Distress’) recorded only in French.

Some: the word has two or more senses shared between ME and the source languages(s). E.g.: *rosari(e)* has four senses shared between Latin and ME (‘Rose-garden’; ‘Paradise (fig.)’; ‘Encyclopaedic work’; and ‘Specific false coin’) but an additional sense (‘Pattern or design of flowers’) recorded only in Latin.

All: ME shares all the senses found in the source lang(s). E.g. *sider* has two senses (‘Cider’ and ‘Intoxicating liquor’) both recorded in French, Latin and ME.

None: None of the senses found in the source languages(s) are found in ME (i.e. ME only has recorded senses of the word which are unique). e.g. *disjoint(e)* has two senses (‘Predicament or straits’ and ‘Great manifestation of feeling’) which are recorded in ME only. The original sense (‘Disjunction, disunion or disconnection’) is found in French/Latin but is not recorded in ME.⁷

As shown in Table 3, the most common sense-sharing label is ‘Some’ i.e. in most cases at least two (but not all) of the senses recorded for a loanword are shared between ME and the source language(s). By contrast, full semantic overlap is quite rare, accounting for only 16% of loanwords: three cases labelled as ‘One of One’ together with five labelled as ‘All’. Essentially, whilst nearly all polysemes in ME in the dataset have etyma which are also polysemes in the donor languages, it is unusual for all senses to match up. Usually we find that there are senses recorded in French/Latin that are not borrowed into ME, or that ME develops new senses for loanwords once they have been borrowed.

Table 3: Sense-sharing scenarios amongst the fifty loanwords

⁷ This is probably due to a gap in the lexicographical record. According to the current *OED2* entry (s.v. *disjoint*) the loanword becomes obsolete in all senses in the sixteenth century.

Shared senses between ME and source language(s):	
One of One	3
One of Some	9
Some	31
All	5
None	2
Total	50

2.1.2. Loanword senses unique to Middle English

Of particular interest to the project are those senses which are unique or ‘native’ to ME and are not found in the donor language(s) before 1450.⁸ These represented a sizeable proportion of the dataset: of 150 total senses for the fifty loanwords examined, forty-five senses (or 30%) were recorded only in ME. Furthermore, more than half of the fifty loanwords (twenty-seven) had at least one sense which developed only in ME. Examples include the French loanword *somer* (in the sense ‘bearer/porter’), the Latin loanword *noli me tangere* (in the sense ‘ill-tempered person’), and the French loanword *quirre* (in the senses of ‘quarry or prey (in hawking)’, ‘ceremony to reward hounds’, ‘bag/collection of game’, and ‘place where quarry lies’).

However, obsolescence dates for loanwords in these ME senses indicate that long-term survival rates are low. As Table 4 shows, cases where a unique ME sense is still used in PDE are in the minority at 20% (9/45) e.g. *pipin* is still used in the sense ‘type of apple’, a sense which is not recorded in French/Latin.⁹ Indeed, in most cases (60% or 27/45) the native sense is obsolete by 1500 e.g. *gruel*, which falls out of use in the sense ‘poultice’ in the second half of the fifteenth century.¹⁰ Crucially, the survival rate of these loanwords in general is much higher with 85% (23/27) still in use in at least one sense in PDE.¹¹ In addition, in sixteen cases (59%), the loanword remains in use in PDE in the sense in which it was first borrowed into ME e.g. *eschaunge* in the sense of ‘Money-changing’.¹²

Table 4: Obsolescence dates for the loanwords in 45 senses recorded only in Middle English

⁸ In nearly all cases, these senses remain unique to English and are never recorded in French or Latin at any point. There are only two exceptions: *phisicien* where the sense of ‘Physical scientist or natural philosopher’ is recorded in ME in a1425 (*MED* s.v. *phisicien*; *OED3* s.v. *physician*) and in CF in 1532 (*TLF* s.v. *physicien*); *method(e)* where the sense ‘Plan of medical treatment’ is recorded in ME in ?a1425 (*MED* s.v. *method(e)*; *OED3* s.v. *method*) and in CF in 1537 (*TLF* s.v. *méthode*).

⁹ *MED* s.v. *pipin*; *OED3* s.v. *pippin*.

¹⁰ *MED* s.v. *gruel*; *OED2* s.v. *gruel*. It is also worth pointing out that out of the twenty-seven cases where a unique sense is obsolete by 1500, there are eleven instances where the *MED* entry lists only one citation for the loanword in that sense.

¹¹ Some native senses which last until PDE emerged after the medieval period.

¹² *MED* s.v. *eschaunge*; *OED2* s.v. *exchange*.

Word in use in this	
Ob 1300-49	1
Ob 1350-99	2
Ob 1400-49	14
Ob 1450-99	10
Ob 1500-49	0
Ob 1550-99	3
Ob 1600-49	3
Ob 1650-99	1
Ob 1700-49	1
Ob 1750-99	0
Ob (19th c.)	1
PDE (19th c.)	3
PDE (20th/21st c.)	6
Total	45

Finally, it is worth noting that twenty-six of the forty-five senses (58%) which developed only in ME were either metaphors or metonyms. We look specifically at figurative language use across the dataset in the following section.

2.2. Figurative senses: metaphor and metonymy

Our focus turns next to how metaphor and metonymy in the etymon were reflected in English. Examples were abundant across the dataset as shown in Table 5, below. 58% (29/50) of the loanwords in ME had at least one figurative sense with a near identical rate of 60% (30/50) for the same terms in French/Latin.

Table 5: Number of loanwords/donor words with figurative senses

Number of loanwords in ME with at least one example of:		Number of donor words in French/Latin with at least one example of:	
Metaphor only	13	Metaphor only	10
Metonymy only	8	Metonymy only	14
Both	8	Both	6
Neither	21	Neither	21
Total 50		Total 50	

2.2.1. 'Native' versus 'borrowed' figurative senses in Middle English

A typology was created to compare the sharing of figurative language across the borrowing and donor languages in closer detail. It is based on the following question: for each metaphor/metonym, in what language(s) are both the literal and the figurative senses found? The main scenario types are given below:¹³

Type 1: None

No metaphorical or metonymic sense recorded in either source language(s) or in ME. E.g.: *fauconer* ('Falconer') has no figurative senses recorded in ME, French or Latin.

Type 2: Both senses in source language(s) only

The literal and the figurative senses are both recorded in the source language(s) but neither is recorded in ME. E.g.: *croupe*, 'Animal's rump' (ME/BML/AF/CF) extended to 'Rounded summit of a hill' (AF/CF). Here the metaphorical use referring to a hill is only found in French but ME does borrow the literal sense of 'Animal rump'.

Type 3: Both senses in Middle English only

The literal and the figurative senses are both recorded in ME but not both recorded in the source language(s). E.g.: *moneier* 'Banker, money-dealer' (ME/BML/AF/CF) extended to 'Virgin Mary, moneyer of Men's needs' (ME). Here a 'native' metaphorical sense from a borrowed literal sense has developed in ME only.

Type 4: Shared

The literal and the figurative senses are both recorded in the source language(s) and in ME. E.g.: *meselri(e)*, 'Leprosy' (ME/AF/CF) extended to 'Leper-house' (ME/CF). Here the metonymic sense is shared between French and ME, presumably because the latter language has borrowed it from the former. It is, of course, not impossible that the same figurative sense developed independently in both English and French, or indeed that French borrowed a figurative sense from English. Furthermore, dates of attestation in historical dictionaries do not always provide infallible proof of borrowing in one direction or another. However, for the

¹³ There are additional sub-categories under Types 2 and 3 in the typology, but space precludes detailing them all here.

purposes of the pilot study, we assume that all loanword senses shared between ME and the donor languages have been borrowed into English.

A total of 103 instances of metaphor and metonymy in the borrowing and donor languages were found and collated for the fifty loanwords. The distribution of the types is shown in Table 6:

Table 6: Number of each type of metaphor and metonymy across the dataset

Figurative sense type	No. of words¹⁴	No. of metaphors	No. of metonyms	Total no. of figurative senses
Type 2	21	36	15	51
Type 3	17	16	10	26
Type 4	17	13	13	26
Total	55	65	38	103

We see that roughly half of scenarios (51/103) are classed as Type 2, i.e. there is a sizeable proportion of cases where we do not find a literal and a figurative sense borrowed in parallel from French/Latin into ME.

The remaining scenarios are those where a literal sense and a figurative sense are recorded in ME. This group divides equally between ‘native’ and ‘borrowed’ metaphors and metonyms: Type 3 (26 cases) where the figurative sense is only found in ME, and Type 4 (26 cases) where the figurative sense is found in both ME and French/Latin.¹⁵

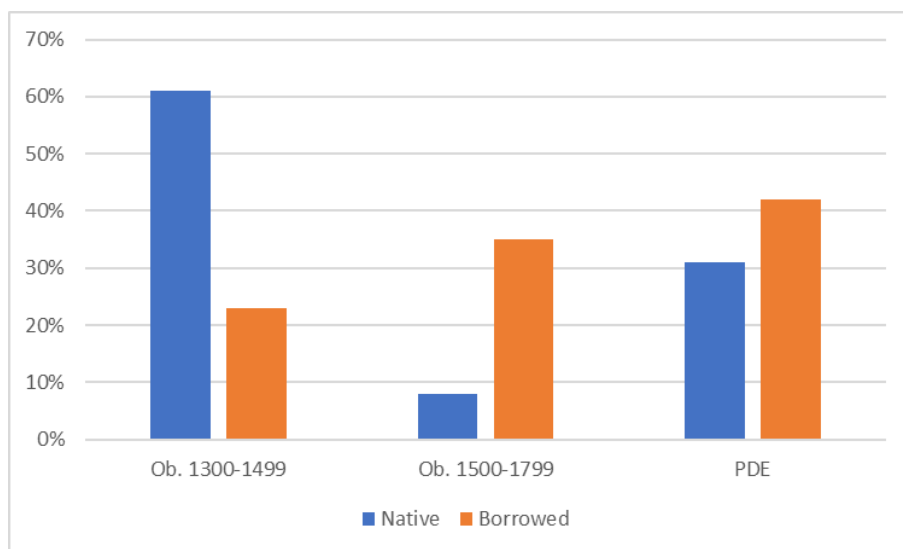
The next question concerned a possible difference in longevity for Type 3 figurative senses compared to Type 4 ones. Results mirrored those discussed above for all senses which develop only in ME, and ‘home-grown’ metaphors and metonyms fall out of use earlier as seen in Graph 1. 61% (16/26) of native metaphors and metonyms fall out of use by 1500 compared to 23% (6/26) of those borrowed.¹⁶ Furthermore, 31% (8/26) of the native metaphors and metonyms are still in use in PDE compared to 42% (11/26) of those borrowed.

¹⁴ This refers to the instances where a word has at least one sense which is an example of a Type 2, 3 or 4 metaphor or metonym. A word may have only a single sense which shows one type of metaphor or metonym or its senses may include a combination of two or more types. For example, *veneri(e)* is labelled as ‘Types 2 and 4’ as it has two Type 2 metonyms (‘Group / band of hunters’, recorded in French but not in ME, and ‘Hunting area’ recorded in Latin but not in ME) and one Type 4 metonym (‘Animals hunted’, recorded in French, Latin and ME). The full breakdown of this distribution is as follows: Type 2 only (6); Type 3 only (5); Type 4 only (6); Types 2 and 3 (7); Types 2 and 4 (6); Types 3 and 4 (3); Types 2, 3 and 4 (2).

¹⁵ In six Type 4 cases, the figurative sense is recorded in ME before the literal one: e.g. *foil* is attested in the metaphorical sense of ‘Thin sheet of metal’ in a1350, followed by the literal sense of ‘Leaf of plant’ in a1399 (MED s.v. *foil*; OED2 s.v. *foil*#1).

¹⁶ It is worth mentioning that amongst those metaphors/metonyms which are obsolete by 1500, there is a notable proportion which only have a single citation in the relevant MED entries: seven out of the sixteen Type 3s and three out of the six Type 4s.

Graph 1: Dates of obsolescence vs. survival: native vs. borrowed metaphors and metonyms



2.2.2. Literal versus figurative senses

An important question is whether figurative senses are commonly borrowed into ME without their original literal senses, as suggested in studies by Allan (2014; 2015). For the pilot study, such scenarios are tagged as Type 2b, defined as follows:

Type 2b: ME and the source language(s) share the figurative sense but the literal sense is only found in source language(s). E.g. *cintre* 'Vault' (CF) to 'Scaffolding supporting vault' (CF/AF/ME/BML). Here, ME only borrows the result of the metonymic shift but not the literal sense.

This scenario was rare: of 103 instances, there are only five cases where the figurative sense was borrowed into ME without the literal sense. In three of these cases, the literal sense is never recorded in English at any point, e.g. the literal sense ('to gild') of the French loanword *endoren* is never attested in English but the metaphorical sense ('to glaze with egg') is attested in 1381.¹⁷ In the other two cases, the literal sense occurs in English after the end of the late medieval period e.g. the literal sense ('To climb/scramble') of the French loanword *raumpen* is attested in English in 1523 whereas the metaphorical sense 'to rear up on hind legs (as if climbing)' is attested in ?a1400.¹⁸

Lastly, we focused on the question of whether figurative senses from loanwords lasted longer in English than the literal ones from which they developed. Were this to be the case, this would support Allan's (2014) suggestion that native terms are more likely to be reserved for concrete senses, with loanwords confined to figurative usages. As Table 7 shows, results suggest that in both Type 3 and Type 4 scenarios (i.e. regardless of whether a metaphor/metonym is 'native' or borrowed'), figurative senses tend not to outlive literal ones in English.

¹⁷ MED s.v. *endoren*; OED2 s.v. *endore*.

¹⁸ MED s.v. *raumpen*; OED3 s.v. *ramp#1*.

Table 7: Comparison of relative longevity of literal and figurative loanword senses in Middle English

	Type 3	Type 4	Total
Literal sense outlives figurative sense:	(Native fig. sense)	(Borrowed fig. sense)	
By less than 100 years		1	1
By circa 100 years	2	3	5
By circa 200 years	6	5	11
By circa 300 years or more	11	5	16
Literal and figurative senses both still in use:			
Both PDE (19th c.)	2	2	4
Both PDE (20th/21st c.)	4	6	10
Figurative sense outlives literal sense:			
By less than 100 years		1	1
By circa 100 years			
By circa 200 years		1	1
By circa 300 years or more	1	2	3
Total	26	26	52

The most common scenario overall, in 63% of cases (33/52), is that the figurative sense becomes obsolete before the literal one e.g. *meselri(e)* is recorded in the sense ‘leprosy’ until 1623 but the metaphorical sense ‘sin of gluttony’ is obsolete by a1475.¹⁹ In a further 27% of cases (fourteen), both senses remain in use until PDE, e.g. *noli me tangere*, the senses ‘skin disease’ and ‘ill-tempered person’ are both recorded in PDE.²⁰ The least common scenario, accounting for only 10% of cases (five), is that the figurative sense outlives the literal one, e.g. *somer* the metaphorical sense ‘beam/support for joists’ remains in use in PDE but the literal sense ‘packhorse’ is last recorded in 1616.²¹

¹⁹ MED s.v. *meselri(e)*; OED3 s.v. *meselry*.

²⁰ MED s.v. *noli me tangere*; OED3 s.v. *noli me tangere*.

²¹ MED s.v. *somer#2*; OED3 s.v. *summer#2*.

2.3. Narrowing and broadening

Finally, we examined semantic narrowing and broadening. Instances were much rarer in the dataset than those of metaphor and metonymy. Given the results of earlier studies which found low levels of autohyponymy across various datasets (Sylvester *et al.* 2022a; 2022b; 2023), this was unsurprising, but it makes fine-grained analysis more challenging here.

We found only twenty-two examples of autohyponymy, of which sixteen (all narrowing) were recorded in ME. Of these sixteen autohyponyms, only four were unique to ME, e.g. *galei(e)*, ‘rowboat’ (ME/CF) narrowed to ‘specific large rowboat used on the Thames’ (ME). In the remaining twelve cases, the generalised and the specialised senses were attested in both ME and the source language(s) e.g. *restoracioun*, ‘curing/restoration to health’ (ME/BML/AF/CF) was found together with ‘curing, setting of bones’ (ME/BML).

We have previously noted that French-origin loanwords seemed more likely to narrow or broaden but that it was unclear whether this shift occurred independently in ME or if two senses of the loanword were borrowed separately from the donor language (Sylvester *et al.* 2022b: 443-444). The figures gained from this pilot analysis, while small, suggest that parallel borrowing of senses is in fact the most common scenario.

Conclusion

In this study we have traced the semantic development of loanwords from French/Latin in ME, in particular outcomes where etymons had more than one sense. A sample of forty such items was analysed. At issue was whether ME tended to borrow only one of those senses, the usual scenario with modern-day cultural loans (Ingham 2021), or whether polysemy in the source language was reflected in ME. More specifically, where the etymon had a figurative as well as a literal sense, did both tend to be borrowed, and did they both survive?

It was found that polysemous borrowing was common, although the respective senses did not usually match completely: this occurred with only five out of forty loans from polysemous etymons. Cases of autohyponymy in ME were rare, with mostly borrowed rather than ‘home-grown’ senses.

The study found that by 1450, loanwords had already developed numerous new senses unattested in French/Latin. Investigation of their longevity in English post-ME showed, however, that they tended to be short-lived.

Figurative senses were rarely borrowed into ME without the literal sense, and figurative senses were less likely to become established in English than non-figurative senses. Borrowed and home-grown non-figurative senses were nearly four times more likely to survive in English for 300 years or more than figurative ones. The suggestion of the opposite outcome by Allan (2014; 2015) was thus not upheld in this sample.

Overall, it was found that although sense obsolescence among loanwords was very considerable even within the medieval period, a large majority of items survived into modern times, typically with more than one of the inherited senses. Our main project will hopefully reveal whether our findings are reflected in a larger body of data, and further explore the significance of sense borrowing in ME.

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